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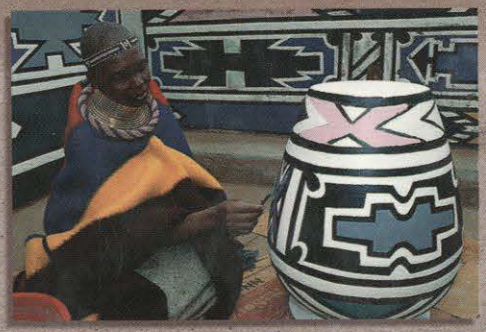

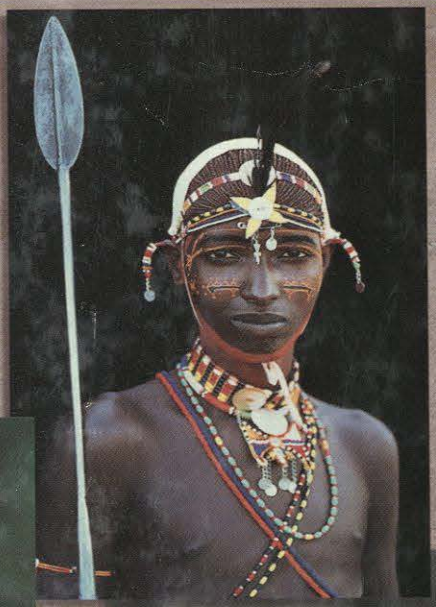

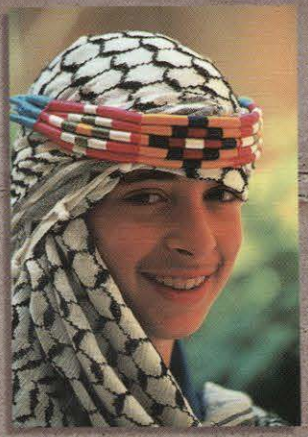

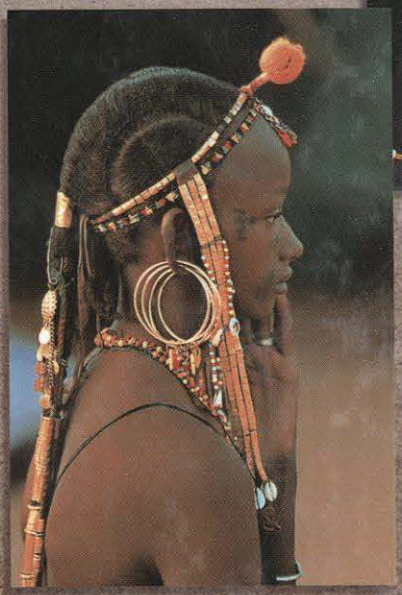

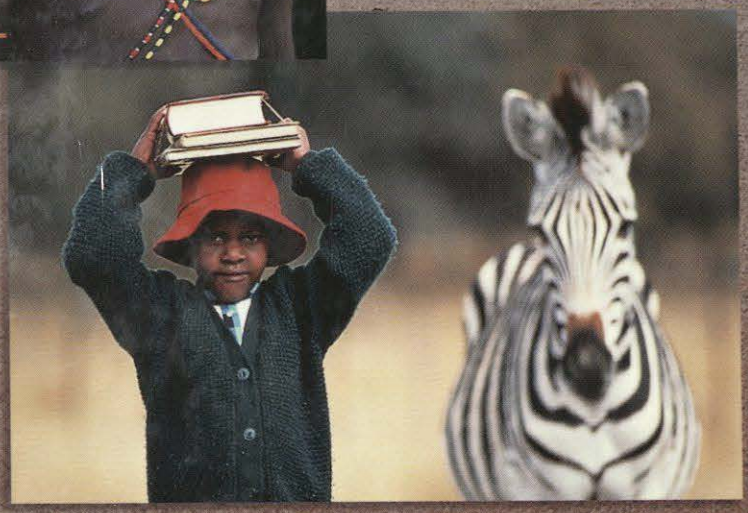

The Diagram Group

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AFRICAN PEOPLES

The Diagram Group

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Encyclopedia of African Peoples

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Facts On File Inc.
11 Penn Plaza
New York NY 10001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Encyclopedia of African peoples/by the Diagram Group.
p.cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-8160-4099-0
1. Africans—Encyclopedias. 2. Ethnology—Africa—Encyclopedias. I. Diagram Group.

DT15 .E53 2000
305.896'003—dc21 99–055125

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Cover design by Cathy Rincon

Printed in the United States of America

RRD DIAG 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper

DT 15 305.896003 .E53 En192 2000 IAS ~~African/AG Amer~~

Foreword

Africa is a vast continent, home to many millions of people. Its history stretches back millennia and encompasses some of the most ancient civilizations in the world. Modern Africa boasts a rich cultural heritage, the legacy of many diverse influences from all around the world, reflecting the central role Africa plays in world history. You will read about Africa's cultures, history, geography, economics, and politics in this book, which provides an invaluable overview of the whole continent, region by region, ethnic group by ethnic group, nation by nation, and celebrity by celebrity. The sections discussed below can be read together to reveal a portrait of Africa as a whole, or accessed separately for vital and interesting facts.

Africa Today The contemporary political and economic status of the five main regions of Africa – North, East, West, Central, and Southern Africa – are introduced in this section. Maps describe the regions' main features, national boundaries, and major cities, roads, and railroads.

The Peoples of Africa This section covers the most identifiable of the continent's several thousand ethnic groups. The entries are arranged alphabetically. Ethnic groups are dynamic and difficult-to-define populations that change, break up, disappear, or emerge, sometimes surprisingly quickly. For the purposes of this book, "ethnic group" is used to refer to people who are linked by a common language, history, religion, and cultural and artistic legacy. The members of an ethnic group can number in the millions or just a few hundred; several groups have histories that stretch back thousands of years.

The larger ethnic groups are dealt with in fascinating detail, with descriptions of their history, language, culture, religion, and society. Specially drawn artworks illustrate the text, and timelines place the group's unique history in the context of the region's history. Thousands of other entries give succinct and insightful descriptions of a great variety of ethnic groups, ranging from Black African cultures to Asian and European communities. Cross-references help you to find groups known by different names. Population figures have been included wherever possible, but they are only estimates since few official figures are available. Maps show the general area a group is concentrated in. Personalities appearing in this section who warrant an entry in "Biographies" are marked '(q.v.)'. In addition, (q.v.) refers to other "Peoples" entries within this section.

Culture and History Taking a completely different approach to the previous section, this section looks at interesting cultural and historical topics that cut across ethnic and national boundaries. Cash crops, Christianity in Ethiopia, tourism, and the lost colony of Carthage are all topics covered here. Historical features on, for example, Ancient Egypt and the four great medieval West African empires of Mali, Songhay, Kanem-Borno, and Ghana describe the rise and fall of some of the world's most powerful and important civilizations. Readers will learn how history can forge new ethnic groups and destroy old ones. Other features detail the horror of more recent events, such as South Africa's apartheid era, which still has a huge influence today on all Southern Africans. The less recent but equally significant slave trade is also covered in this section. Cultural topics are explored in features that cover music, from drumming through South African jazz to global pop stars; hairstyles, both real and imagined; buildings; and food and drink. Both the prehistoric rock art of the Sahara and contemporary African art and its influence on the West are discussed in separate features. Environmental threats such as deforestation and desertification as well as the refugee problem are also covered in detail. Personalities appearing in this section who warrant an entry in "Biographies" are marked '(q.v.)'.

The Nations Each of Africa's fifty-three nations are covered separately in this section, which is arranged alphabetically. This includes the island nations of Madagascar, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the Seychelles. The disputed territory of the Western Sahara also has its own entry. A wealth of facts and figures are given for each country, ranging from a color-coded illustration of the national flag and the title of the national anthem to the figures for life expectancy, employment, and level of urbanization. The geography sections describe the country's landscape, features, and climate. Timelines capture the main events in each nation's recent history.

Biographies Since the earliest civilizations, important Africans have shaped history and culture both inside and outside of Africa. The biographies of more than three hundred of these famous Africans appear in this section. Entries describe the life and legacy of each personality, illustrating that while ethnicity is important in Africa it is not the only trait that defines a person. A wide range of people are covered, from marathon runners and novelists to ancient royals and twentieth-century dictators and heroes. Within "Biographies," individuals who have their own entry appear in upper case where they occur in other entries.

Glossary and Index An extensive glossary defines unfamiliar words used throughout the book. The comprehensive index can be used to research related topics throughout the book and to find ethnic groups.

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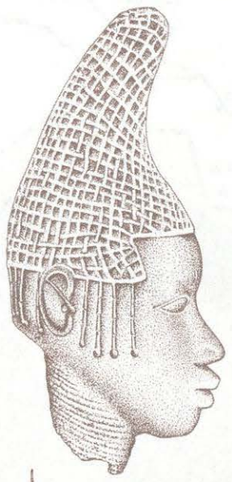
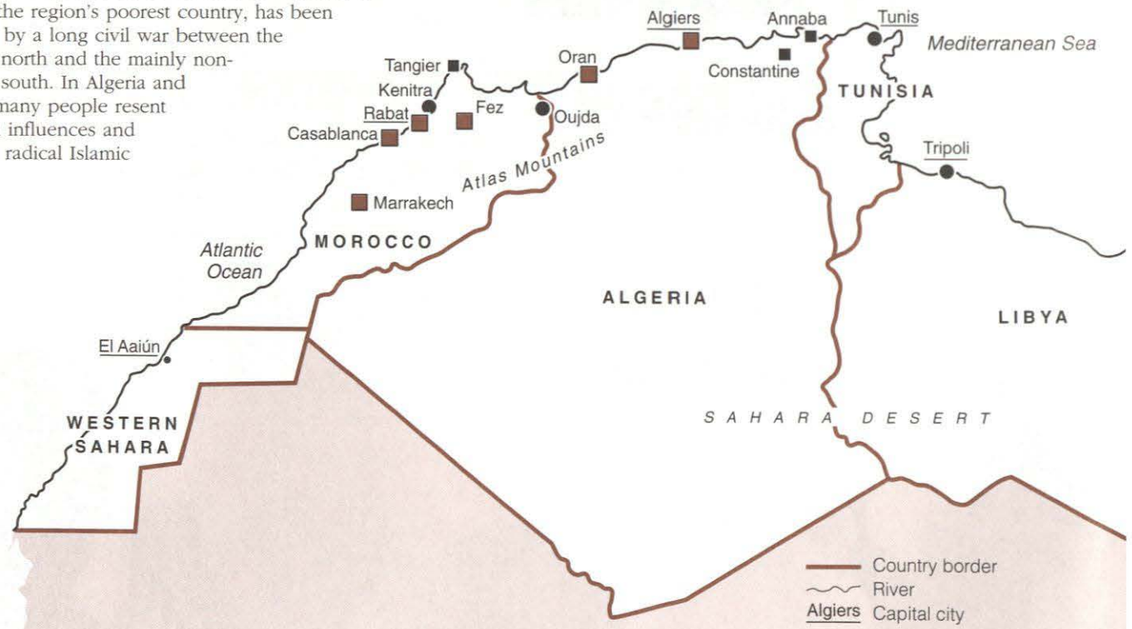
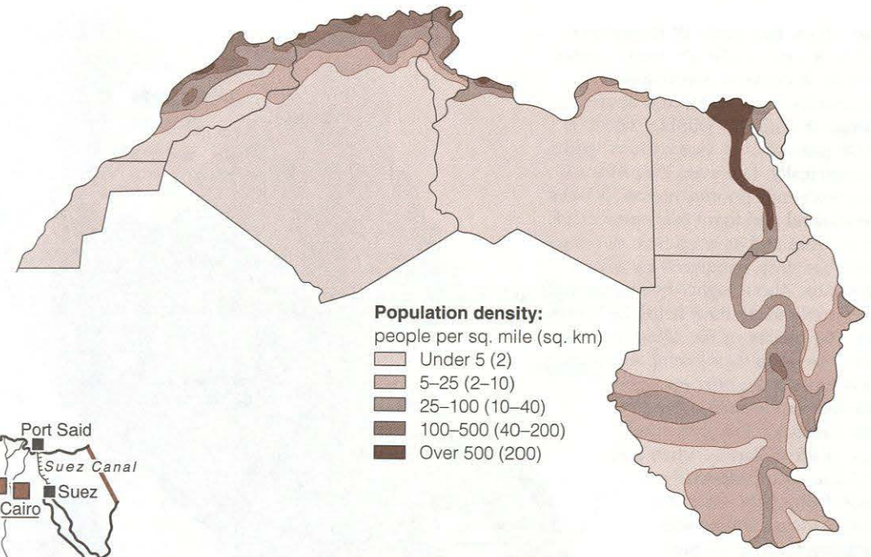
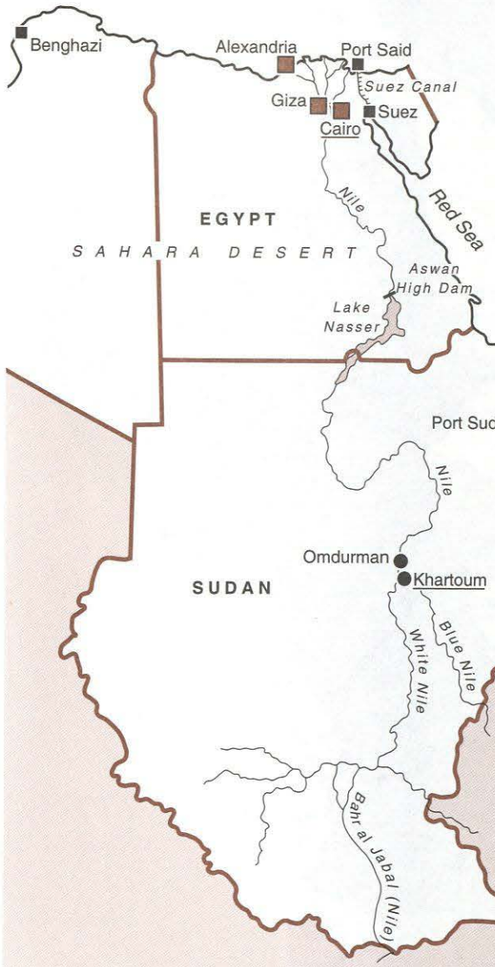


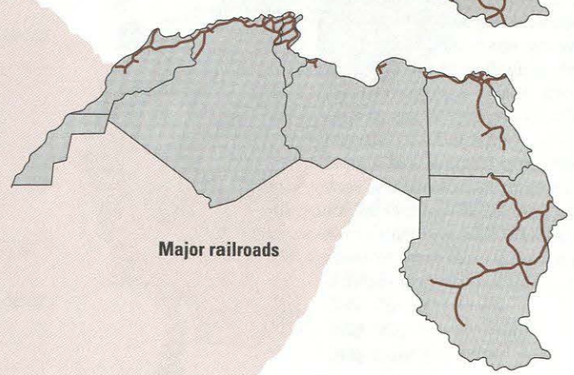
Africa today: North

North Africa is one of the continent's more prosperous regions. This is largely because of the huge reserves of oil and natural gas beneath the deserts, especially in Algeria and Libya. Another reason is that most North African countries have more stable economies than other African countries. With few exceptions, the sub-Saharan countries are economically dependent on agriculture and the export of raw materials – agricultural and mineral – the prices of which fluctuate on the world market. North Africa faces its own problems, however. The economy of Sudan, the region's poorest country, has been drained by a long civil war between the Muslim north and the mainly non-Muslim south. In Algeria and Egypt, many people resent Western influences and support radical Islamic fundamentalist movements, which they see as the best means of preserving their culture. A hangover from colonial days is the unresolved issue of Western Sahara. This phosphate-rich desert territory has been occupied by Morocco – for a while jointly with Mauritania – since Spain withdrew in 1975. Support for Saharan nationalists from other African countries has isolated Morocco, which left the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in protest.









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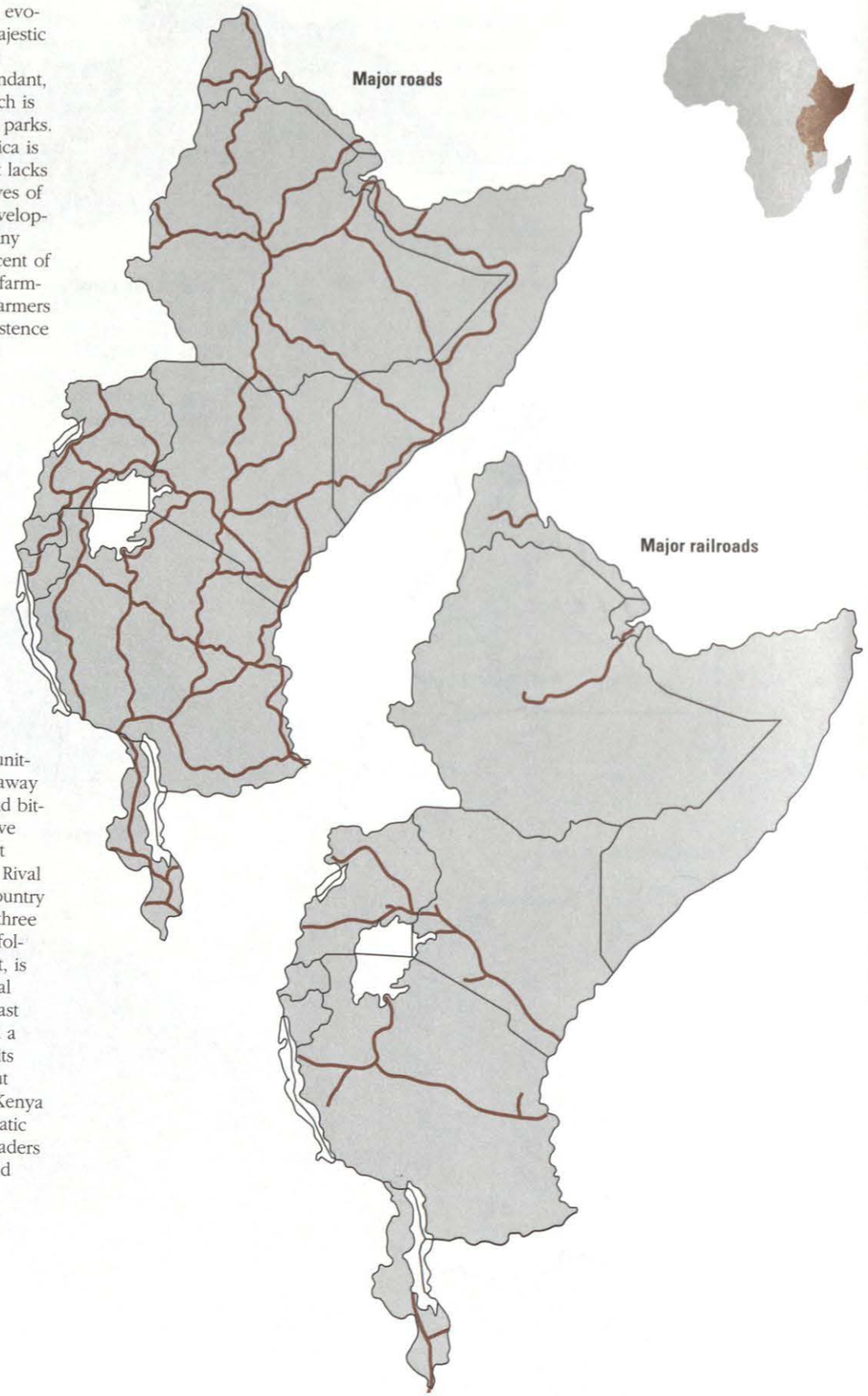
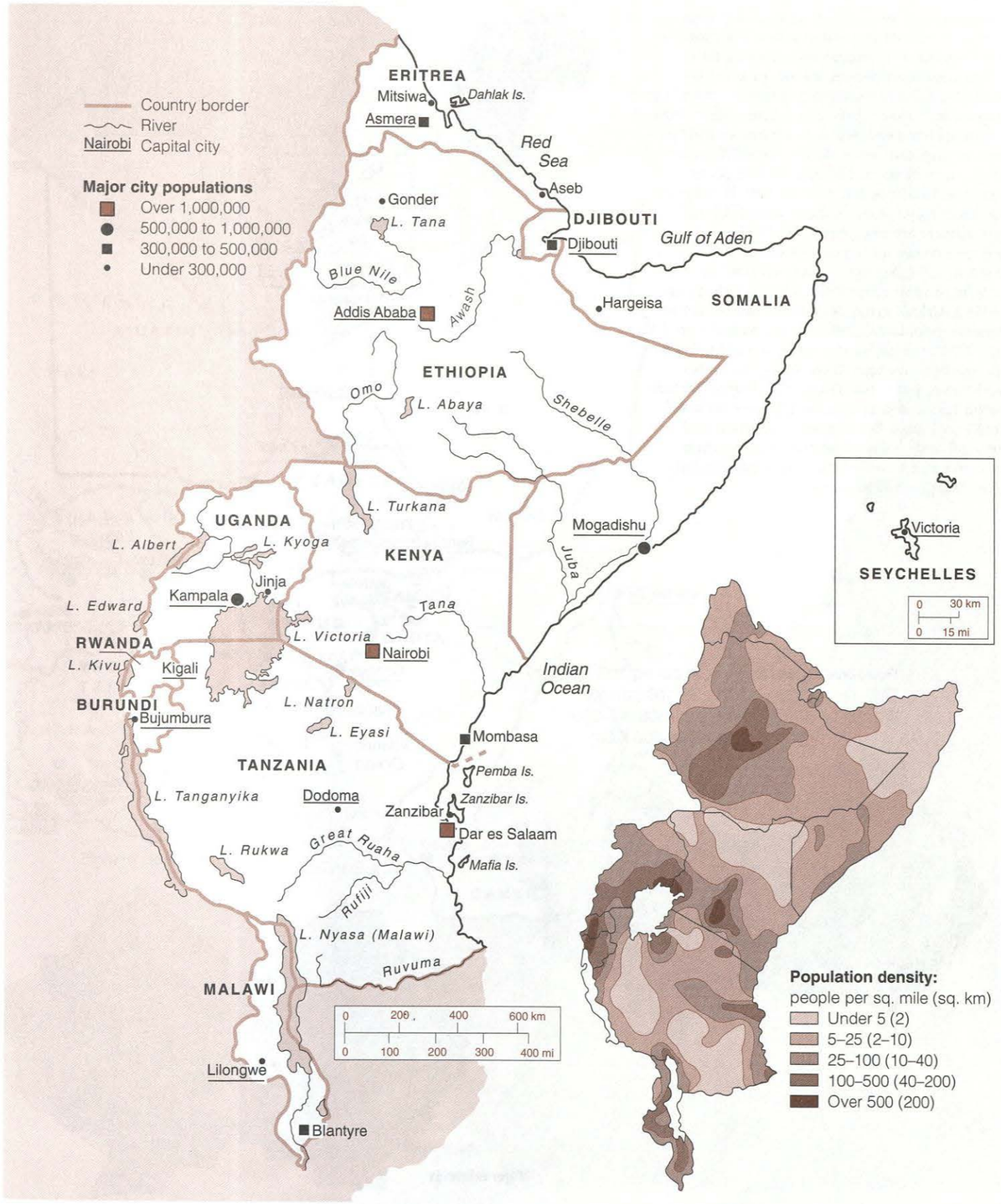
Africa today: East

East Africa, the cradle of human evolution, is one of Africa's most majestic regions. It contains snowcapped mountains, huge lakes, and abundant, though threatened, wildlife, which is partly preserved in vast national parks. Economically, however, East Africa is the continent's poorest region. It lacks the mineral and fossil fuel reserves of other areas and its economic development has been hampered by many problems. About eighty-five percent of the people make their living by farming. The quality of life of most farmers is low because they live at subsistence level (producing only enough to provide for the basic needs of their families). This precarious way of life collapses when natural disasters – especially prolonged droughts – ruin harvests, causing famine and suffering on a vast scale. Judged by their per capita (for each person) gross national products (GNPs), Rwanda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, are the poorest countries, followed closely by Tanzania, Malawi, and Somalia. The economic growth of several countries has been put into reverse by civil war. Eritrea, which was united with Ethiopia in 1952, broke away in the early 1990s after a long and bitter war. Burundi and Rwanda have been rocked by appalling conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu. Rival clans in Somalia have torn the country apart, effectively dividing it into three separate regions, while Uganda, following much bloody civil conflict, is still struggling to maintain national unity. Kenya is the most stable East African country. It has developed a strong tourist industry alongside its cash crop farming and a small but important manufacturing sector. Kenya has been held together by autocratic one-party rule and many of its leaders fear that a multiparty system could result in division and strife.





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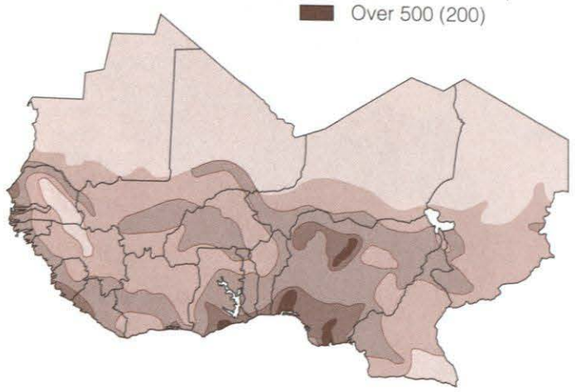
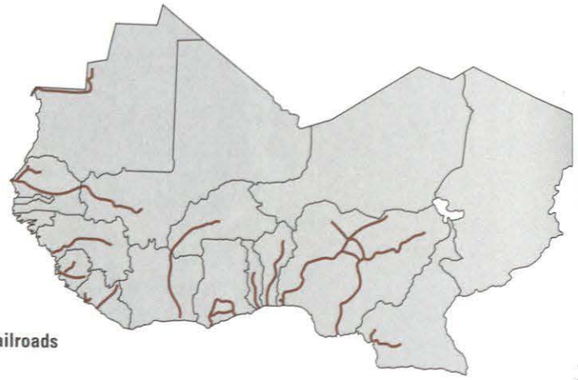
Africa today: West

In under forty years, West Africa has emerged from colonialism into nationhood. The path has not been smooth. Ethnic and religious differences combined with economic problems – including falls in commodity prices for such key exports as cocoa – have caused instability. Most countries have resorted to one-party or military rule to maintain order. By the mid-1990s, however, many West African nations had either returned to democratic rule or were in transition to democracy. Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia, and Nigeria are exceptions. While Gambia enjoyed nearly thirty years of democracy until a coup in 1994, Nigeria has had civilian rule for only nine years since 1960. This oil-rich nation is West Africa's giant, containing almost half the region's population. Yet its gross national product (GNP) per capita (for each person) is below the regional average. West African countries with lower per capita GNPs than Nigeria include Sierra Leone and Liberia, which have both suffered civil wars. By contrast, Cameroon and Senegal have enjoyed relative stability; their governments have led the way in successfully exploiting limited resources.

Population density: people per sq. mile (sq. km)

- Under 5 (2)
- 5–25 (2–10)
- 25–100 (10–40)
- 100–500 (40–200)
- Over 500 (200)





Major railroads

Major roads

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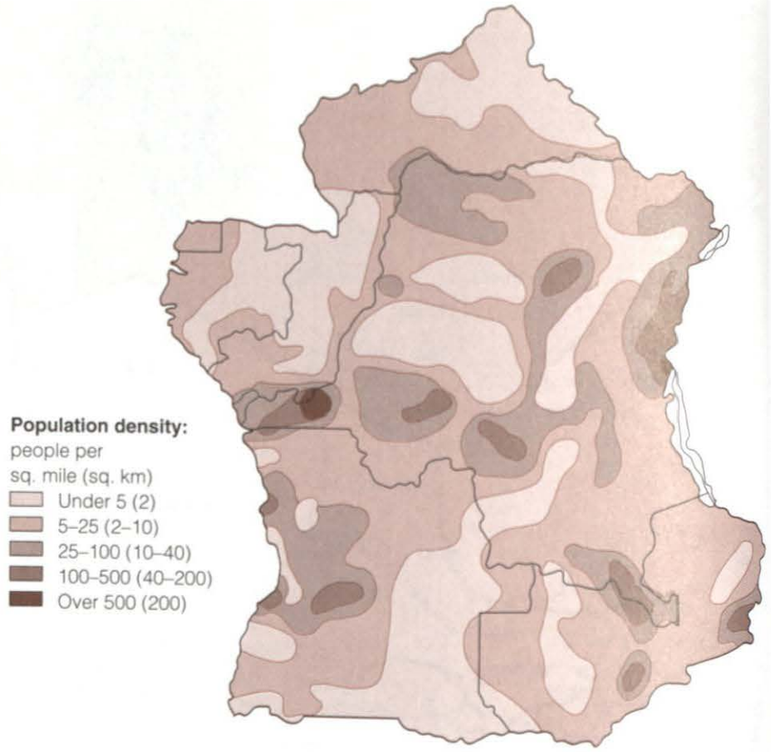
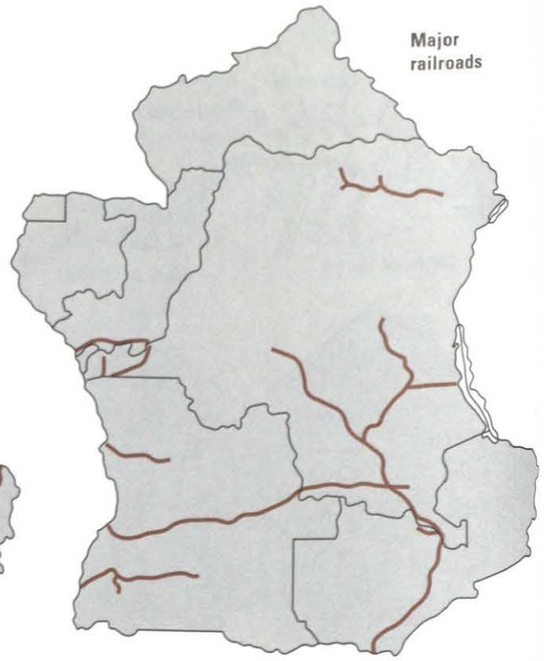
Africa today: Central

In recent years, the progress of many Central African countries has been hampered by instability. The Democratic Republic of Congo, the region's largest country, exploded into civil war when, as Zaire, it became independent in 1960. Despite autocratic rule by President Mobutu Sese Seko from 1965 to 1997, secessionist groups – especially in the mineral-rich southern region of Shaba (formerly Katanga) – periodically made the country ungovernable. Angola has been disrupted by a twenty-year civil war, which has only recently ended. The people of two other countries, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Equatorial Guinea, lived through years of rule by brutal despots. In 1966, the tyrannical Jean-Bédel Bokassa seized power in CAR and went so far as to declare himself "emperor," changing the name of his country to the "Central African Empire" between 1976 and 1979. Francisco Macías Nguema, dictator of Equatorial Guinea, executed and imprisoned thousands of people without trial between 1970 and 1979. The economic success of Central Africa is Gabon, whose exploitation of oil, gas, uranium, and various metal deposits has made it one of Africa's most successful countries in terms of its per capita (for each person) gross national product (GNP). Most of its citizens, however, practice subsistence agriculture, obtaining little benefit from the exploitation of their country's resources. Gabon's stability was bolstered by a long period of one-party rule. Although banning opposition parties may create stability, it also fosters inefficiency and corruption. Most countries in Central Africa are now restoring democratic institutions, despite ethnic tensions and recurring civil war.





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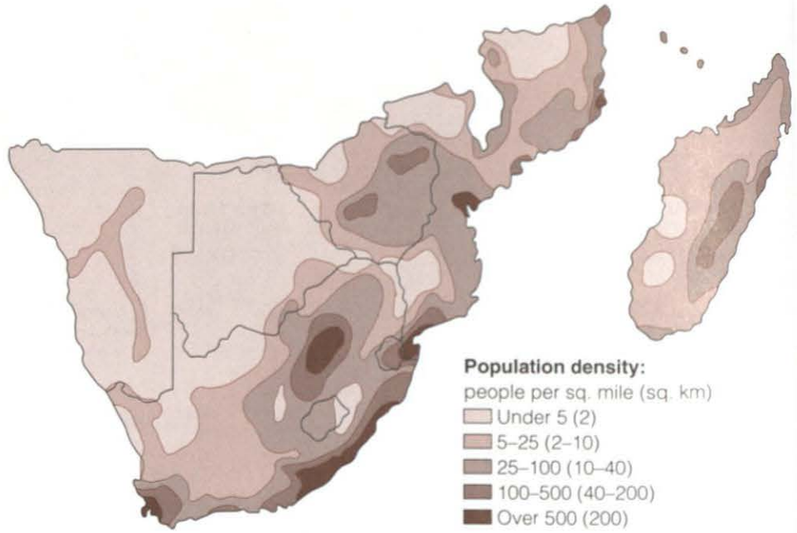
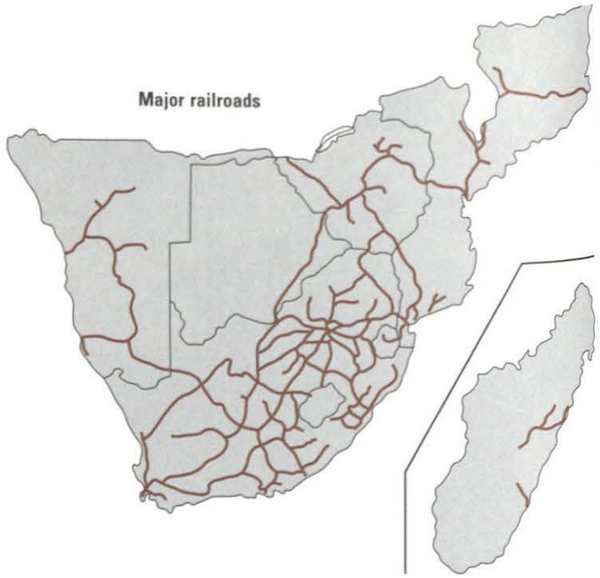
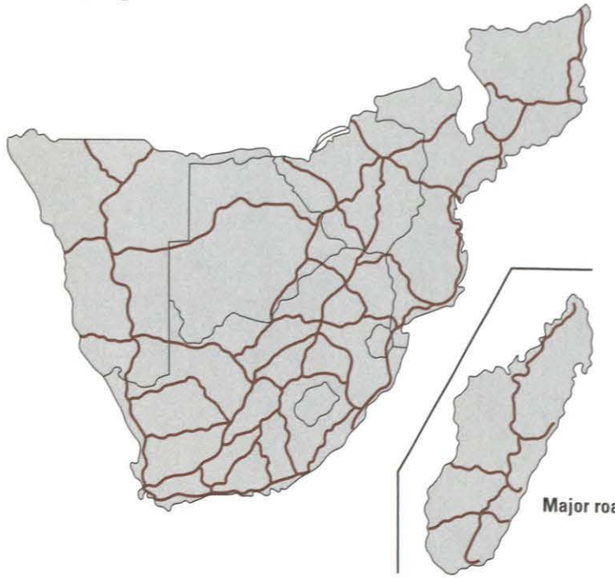
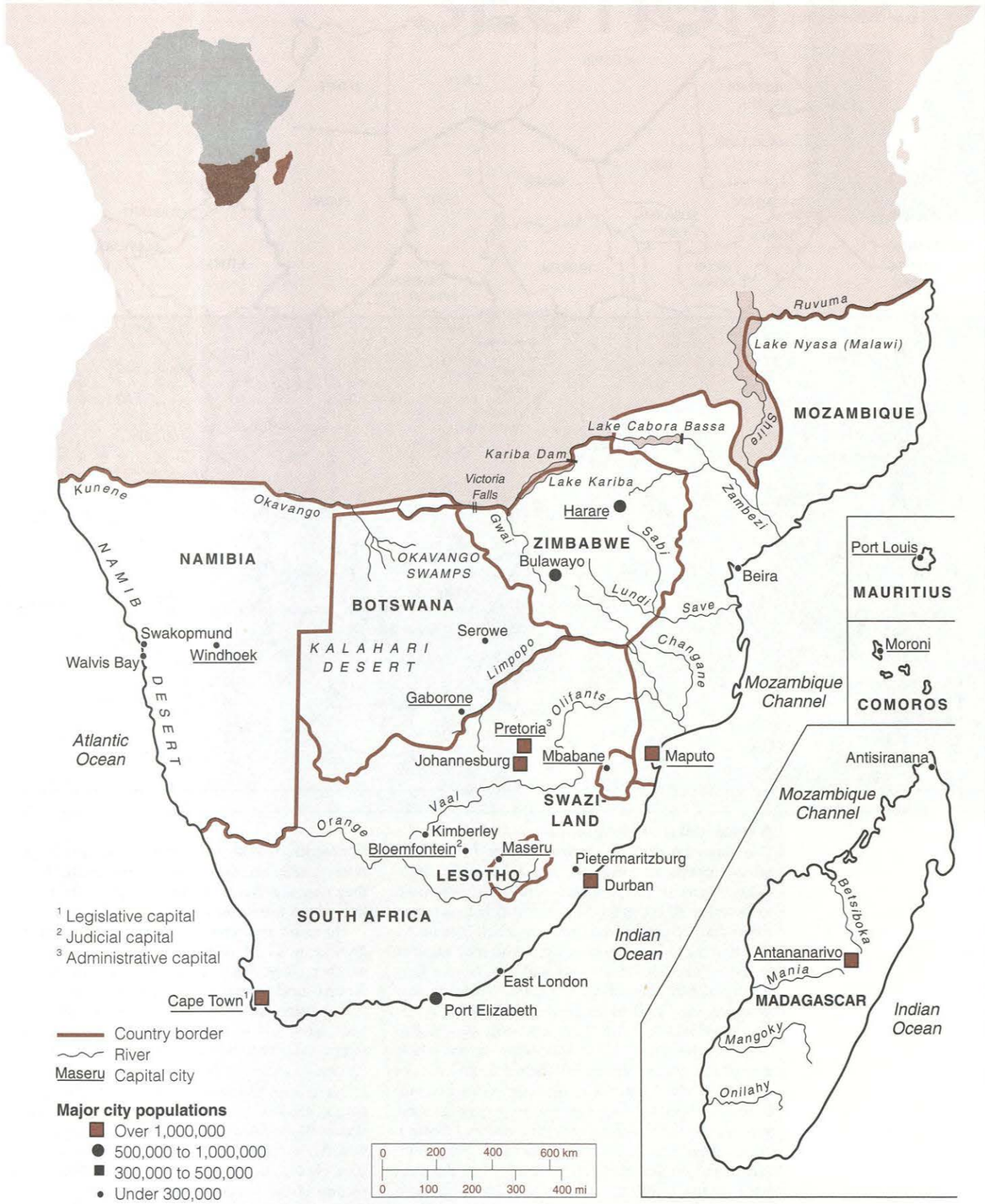
Africa today: Southern

South Africa, Africa's most powerful and wealthiest nation, has dominated Southern Africa for many years. It occupied Namibia from 1915 – illegally from 1969 – until 1990 and supported rebel forces in Mozambique and Angola. South Africa also aided the white-minority regime in Rhodesia until that country became independent as Zimbabwe in 1980. South Africa's intervention in the affairs of its neighbors was part of a destabilizing strategy aimed at preserving its system of racial segregation known as apartheid. Since 1994, however, the government of Nelson Mandela has sought to replace racial hatred with reconciliation, while in other parts of Africa the country has begun to act as a mediator in disputes. The Republic of South Africa faces great problems arising from the inequalities of apartheid. In 1993, the white population controlled about eighty-eight percent of the country's wealth, while almost half of the people of South Africa lived below subsistence level with a family income of less than US $200 per month. Other countries in Southern Africa with relatively high per capita (for each person) gross national products (GNPs) are mineral-rich Botswana, one of Africa's most stable democracies, and Namibia. The poorest countries are Mozambique and Madagascar, whose economies are based on subsistence agriculture. Mozambique's economy has been shattered by both civil war and drought.









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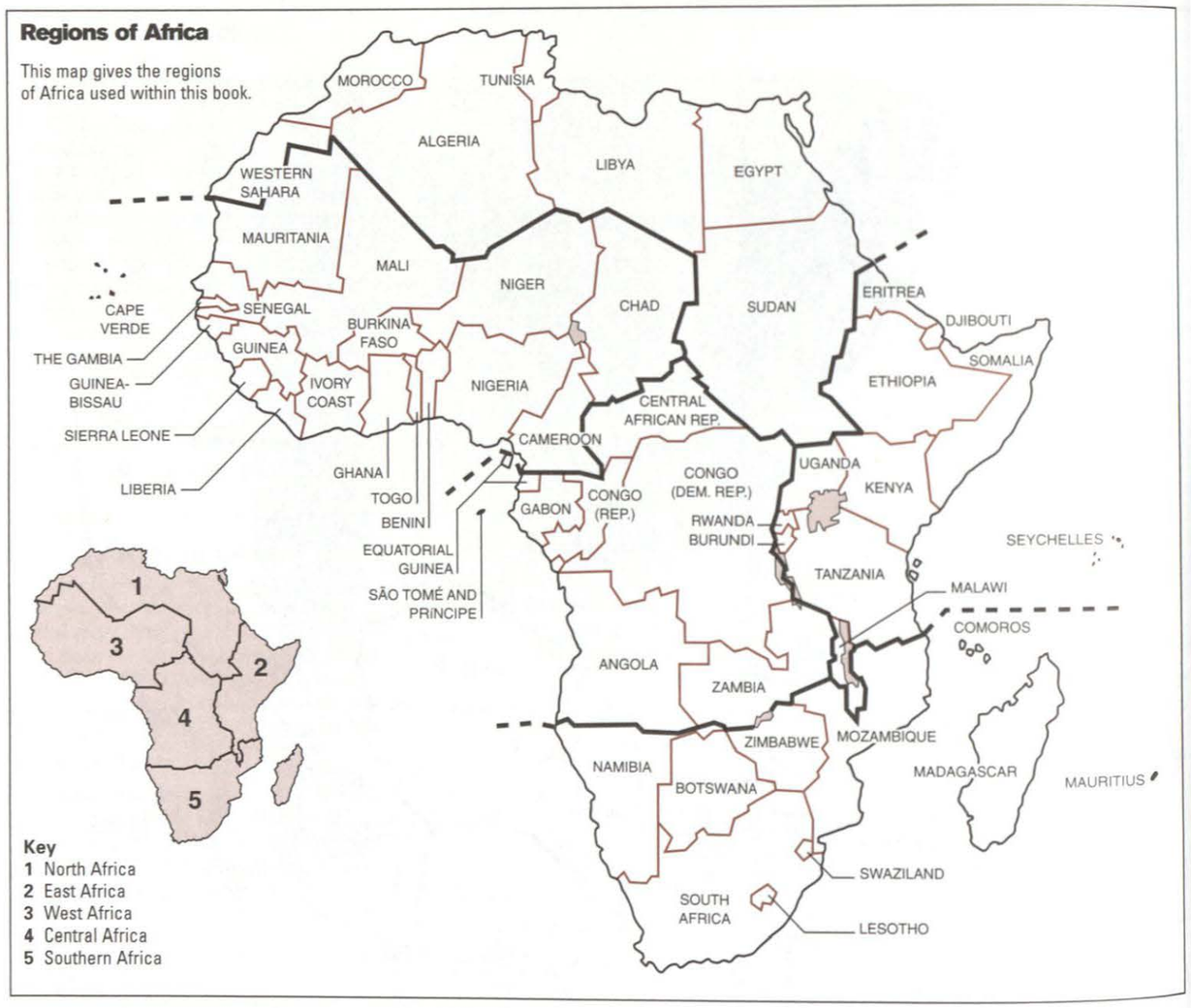
Regions of Africa

This map gives the regions of Africa used within this book.



Key
1 North Africa
2 East Africa
3 West Africa
4 Central Africa
5 Southern Africa

A word about ethnic groups

The *Encyclopedia of African Peoples* focuses on ethnic groups or peoples, useful but difficult-to-define terms. In the past, the word "tribe" was used to describe ethnic groupings, but this is today considered an offensive and arbitrary label. It is incorrect to refer to a group of people who may number in the hundreds of thousands and who have a long history of nation building as a tribe. "Tribe" is now generally used only to describe a basic political unit that exists within some larger ethnic groups, not to describe the group itself. So what is an ethnic group? An ethnic group is distinct from race or nationality; the former is rarely used today because it requires broad and inaccurate generalizations; and the latter describes only the national boundaries within which a person is born or lives. Both categories are fraught with difficulty. For the purposes of this book, the term "ethnic group" is used to describe people who have a common language, history, religion, and cultural and artistic heritage; they may also have a common way of life and often live within the same geographical area.

There are probably more than a thousand ethnic groups in all of Africa. Many are related to one another, often in complex ways. Groups have subgroups and even sub-subgroups. Intermarriage, colonialism, conquest, and migration through the ages have led to many combinations and to an intermixing of influences. In this book we have chosen to focus on only a fraction of Africa's many ethnic groups. A number of factors – including population figures, available information, and recognition outside Africa – were used in making the selection. To a certain extent, however, it was an arbitrary choice, but one that we hope offers a vibrant picture of the people of this continent.

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